

August 5th, 2003
Rocky Mountain Best Western
7:00 P.M.

August Workshop #1 – Whitefish – DNRC Land Use Planning Process

The public was asked to write down on index cards and then discuss how they are currently using the lands, what concerns they have about land uses and what opportunities they might see. The results are as follows:

General Comments:

Overall, the beneficiaries should be involved in this process. Perhaps the lands could be used by the beneficiaries more directly, i.e., for outdoor courses and work study opportunity – activities which are focused on the land and have long term benefits.

The DNRC should be responsible land stewards and trust managers.

Development on State Land might be a catalyst for development on adjacent private lands and vice versa.

It is important to keep recreation dollars coming into the valley.

It is important to maintain public access all around Whitefish Lake.

Current Land Uses:

The lands close to town provide opportunities for hiking, biking and walking dogs. Happy Valley has trails for hiking, mountain biking, running, cross country skiing and dog walking. Spencer and Haskill offer hiking, biking and dog walking.

There is also some snow mobiling and 4-wheeling at Happy Valley.

The rifle club has a 31-acre lease at the south end of Spencer. They are located adjacent to an old archery range which is not currently in use.

Spencer offers opportunities for mountain biking, cross country skiing, trail running, fishing, dirt biking, hiking and a “swimming hole”.

The topography at Spencer lends itself to biking (good hill).

Stillwater, Beaver Lake and Swift Creek offer snowshoeing, cross country skiing, dog walking and hiking.

Haskill and Swift Creek offer gateway trail access to Big Mountain and associated recreation opportunities.

Currently, Stoltze Lumber provides access to state land and vice versa. Stoltze's goal is to manage the land for timber.

A variety of wildlife has been observed at Spencer with the exception of Elk.

Beaver Lake offers hiking, hunting, four-wheeling and skiing.

Cabin holders at Beaver Lake enjoy wildlife including black bear, mountain lions, loons, and deer. They enjoy horse back riding and huckleberry picking. Beaver Lake offers canoeing, kayaking, and fishing.

All of the lands in the study area provide opportunities for hiking, biking, swimming, kayaking, dog walking, fire wood gathering, cross country skiing, horse back riding, snow shoeing and dirt biking (illegal).

People enjoy kayaking, biking fishing, dog walking and horse back riding at Spencer.

Haskill offers equestrian opportunities.

The north side of Skyles Lake is used for horse back riding.

The southern end of the Beaver/Skyles Lakes area is used for hiking and mountain biking.

Beaver/Skyles Lakes area has provided a long term sustainable supply of timber (70 million board feet in 70 years), as well as recreation and wildlife habitat.

Beaver Lake is not as suited for recreational uses because of its topography and difficult/less user-friendly access. It is also largely surrounded by private lands.

Happy Valley provides undeveloped space for walking dogs, riding bikes, etc.

Swift Creek provides swimming and hiking, mostly near Smith Lake.

Haskill is a truly local “hot spot” for local recreation.

Concerns and Issues:

Major changes will affect wildlife and public services.

Regarding the rifle club’s use of the land at Spencer, as more homes are developed on adjacent private land, there is increasing concern about noise. The Club wants to stay at its current location as it provides easy access to its 400 members.

Currently there is some illegal dumping occurring at Happy Valley.

It is important to keep established recreation.

Many of the qualities that Haskill offers are directly related to accessibility to and through neighboring Stoltze Lumber properties.

Public access to state land is very important and must be maintained.

Development at Iron Horse resulted in some conflicts with Grizzly Bears. Wildlife habitat is a major concern.

Wildlife at Spencer includes foxes and deer. Mountain lions frequent Haskill, Happy Valley and Swift Creek.

The loss of open space for wildlife and recreation is a concern now and in the future.

The loss of actively managed forest land (managed for timber) is a concern.

We should not be seduced by “big money”. Rather, we should consider these lands for the “long haul”.

Development on adjacent land could impact Stoltze’s timber management goal by increasing road use and associated dust – road standards might have to change, requiring significant upgrades.

Increasing the intensity of recreational use on Stoltze and adjacent lands can result in a number of impacts including vandalism, dumping and the spread of noxious weeds. Stoltze will monitor the planning process to determine how the plan will impact their ability to manage their lands.

There is a concern over the spread of insect and disease from unmanaged state lands to private lands.

There is a concern that there is an increased risk of wild fire due to increased recreational use.

In the past areas (around Stoltze and elsewhere) have been zoned without public input. This planning process and associated recommendations should reflect public input.

A wildlife corridor exists from Whitefish Lake, through the Lion Mountain, Spencer Lake and Spencer Mountain areas.

Horse back riding has been impacted by timbering at Skyles.

The private purchase of land near Lion Mountain has impacted the ability to ride horses at Skyles.

A timber sale on Section 29 at Beaver Lake obliterated the trail.

Spencer Lake is visible from all over the valley and therefore residential uses would be more obvious and more of an eyesore than in other areas close to town with better access.

Spencer Lake has some seemingly important old growth areas and there is a concern about fire danger due to high fuel in certain areas.

There have been some historically poor logging practices which virtually obliterated hiking uses in Skyles/Beaver Lakes Area (particularly the 2000 or 2001 sale).

Haskill has already been impacted by adjacent real estate development and the associated loss of access and trails.

Houses now nearly surround the Happy Valley/KM area and their noise and litter disrupt the area.

There is a concern that land will be sold to develop for those with high end incomes.

Opportunities:

The conflict between the rifle club and adjacent residential development could be mitigated by the creation of a buffer zone of 3-400 feet around the rifle range area.

A small RV site might be added to the rifle range lease to provide camping sites for people attending events.

Residential development is occurring on the private property adjacent to the east side of Happy Valley. Any development should occur in close proximity to this existing residential development.

There may be an opportunity to cluster homes at Happy Valley that feature energy efficiency (off the grid).

Logging of Happy Valley has been done well, preserving old trees – and providing for enhanced recreation.

At Happy Valley, the DNRC Forest Demonstration Plots offer educational opportunities and the northwest section of Happy Valley could be used to demonstrate various forest practices and methods.

If development occurs, then it should be clustered.

We should work on getting more money to DNRC for recreational uses and we should put our money where our mouth is.

Spencer offers good recreational opportunities in close proximity to town – trails, lake access and good topography – and fresh air.

The plan should help preserve recreation, wildlife corridors and trail easements.

Stoltze is interested in continuing to actively manage for timber on its lands and state lands. Active timber management is a key component and enhances wildlife habitat and opportunities for recreation. Stoltze provides recreation for free to the public, but at a cost to Stoltze. They are interested in maintaining a neighborly accommodation.

The plan should consider alternatives to development including land swaps to direct development elsewhere.

By linking Skyles-Spencer-Whitefish-Hwy 93, a bike trail could be developed.

Link Spencer Mountain trails with new bike paths being established in the City of Whitefish.

A small piece of Skyles could be used for a cluster development by transferring development rights from Spencer.

A portion of the resort tax could be used for open space, given the value that open space gives to the community's tourist economy.

A real estate transfer tax might also be considered to fund open space.

Regardless of the future use of the Beaver/Skyles Lakes area, the vegetation must continue to be managed.

Beaver/Skyles Lakes area might be the best site for support of recreational uses elsewhere.

Southern parcels on Hwy 93 are most suited to residential development due to good quality access.

In identifying trails, it might be useful to get more accurate location information. Perhaps a biker or equestrian could "GPS" it.

Access for hikers and bikers and swimmers at Spencer Lake should be maintained.

Safe, undeveloped land for wildlife should be maintained.

Cluster development can take place in a way that preserves recreation.

Cluster development should feature adequate parking at its perimeter and make use of alternative energy sources (off the grid), be highly energy efficient and clean. 60% of the homes should be set aside for those with incomes of 120% or less of adjusted median income.